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**Multi-Vectorism in Belarusian Foreign
Policy**

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Abstract

This research examines the multi-vectored nature of Belarusian foreign policy since 1996 when Alexander Lukashenka solidified his regime in Belarus until today. The trends in Belarusian foreign policy are analyzed through the scope of interdependency and its intricate interplay with Belarusian national identity, or in other words, how President Lukashenka understands and interprets the Belarusian people. Since the early 2000s, it appeared that Belarus changed its foreign policy in an attempt to become less dependent on Russia and more open to working with new partners. Officially, Lukashenka has consistently maintained a multi-vector approach to Belarusian foreign policy and also in practice, despite intermittent speculation that Belarus might drastically change the dynamics of its foreign policy. Decreasing dependence is not motivation enough to completely alter perceived stability and a reluctance for change among the Belarusian people. Lukashenka uses the flexibility of his foreign policy to try to extract some benefits from global partners; however, the status quo of Lukashenka's foreign policies continues to remain intact.

Keywords

Belarus, President Alexander Lukashenka, Multi-vector, multipolar, foreign policy, interdependence, national identity, dependence

Abstrakt

Tento výzkum se zabývá multi-vectored charakter běloruského zahraniční politiky od roku 1996, kdy Alexandr Lukašenko zpevnil jeho režim v Bělorusku až do dneška. Trendy v běloruském zahraniční politiky jsou analyzovány pomocí rozsah vzájemné provázanosti a jeho složitou souhru s běloruskou národní identity, nebo jinými slovy, jak prezident Lukašenko rozumí a interpretuje běloruskému lidu. Od počátku roku 2000 se ukázalo, že Bělorusko změnila svou zahraniční politiku ve snaze stát se méně závislé na Rusku a více otevření spolupráci s novými partnery. Oficiálně Lukašenko neustále udržoval multi-vector přístup k běloruské zahraniční politice a také v praxi, a to navzdory občasné spekulacím, že Bělorusko by mohlo drasticky změnit dynamiku své zahraniční politiky. Snižující závislost není dostatečnou motivací, aby úplně změnit vnímanou stabilitu a neochotu ke změně mezi běloruského lidu. Lukašenko využívá flexibilitu jeho zahraniční politiky pokusit se extrahovat některé výhody plynoucí z globálních partnerů; Nicméně, status quo Lukašenkem své zahraniční politiky nadále zůstávají nedotčeny.

Klíčová slova

Bělorusko, prezident Alexandr Lukašenko, Multi-vektor, multipolárním, zahraniční politika, závislost, národní identita

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Declaration of Authorship

1. The author hereby declares that he compiled this thesis independently, using only the listed resources and literature.
2. The author hereby declares that all the sources and literature used have been properly cited.
3. The author hereby declares that the thesis has not been used to obtain a different or the same degree.

Prague 20 May 2016

Haylee Behrends

Acknowledgments

I dedicate this work to whomever may read it. I would also like express my gratitude for the continued hope and encouragement provided by my family, friends, and colleagues, without which I would surely be lost.

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1. Introduction

At the onset of my research, I initially wanted to avoid any attempt in answering the national identity or Lukashenka questions regarding Belarus. My goal was to analyze Belarus in a way that does not have to address what it means to be Belarusian and how that can be realized in Lukashenka's regime. I quickly realized that Belarus cannot be understood without understanding Lukashenka's regime and how it could potentially be a reflection of Belarusian national identity. The assumption among many people who are not from Belarus, and among some people there, is that the Belarusian people do not have a voice and their opinions are not reflected in President Lukashenka's regime. Instead, this research assumes that Belarusian identity and the wants of the people is in fact reflected in Lukashenka's regime and he bases his policies on his understanding of what the Belarusian people want, what it means to be Belarusian, and what is best for the Belarusian nation and the Belarusian state. Belarusian national identity is not as easily understood as other national identities and arguably the entire country is an enigma. Instead of tackling the difficult question of Belarusian national identity or the regime of Lukashenka, my research focuses on Lukashenka's foreign policy in recent years. His foreign policy appeared to be transforming lately and the relationship between Belarus and Russia appeared to be weakening. This research seeks to answer the question of what transformations have taken place in Belarusian foreign policy and *why*.

Multi-vectored foreign policy, also known as multi-polarized, is an approach that emphasizes a policy focused on more than one exclusive partner. President Lukashenka officially adopted this foreign policy in the 1990s. The reasoning behind his adoption of

this policy often changes and depends on the current international climate. Did Belarus adapt its foreign policy in response to external factors, for example Russia adopting a different foreign policy than it had in the 1990s? Is President Lukashenka more willing to work with other partners because he wants Belarus to become a more open and active participant in an ever globalizing world? The foreign policy of Belarus has *officially* not changed since 1996, the year Lukashenka solidified his regime, and has not changed in practice either if one looks at the trend over the past 20 years in Belarus foreign relations. At given specific times, sometimes Belarus seems to apply its official policy more in practice, but the trend is towards keeping relationships with foreign partners at the status quo. By analyzing Lukashenka's regime and the role of interdependence in Belarusian foreign policy, I hope to uncover the motives behind the multi-vector foreign policy of Lukashenka and reveal that Lukashenka's foreign policy officially and practically has not changed, despite recent postulation that it may have.

2. Methodology

The main sources of information in this paper draw from President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenka himself, opinions of Belarusian elites, and the official foreign policies of Belarus and its respective international partners. The methodology used in this paper relies heavily on the opinions of Belarusian elites compiled by the Stefan Batory Foundation in 2006. This foundation is based in Poland and members of this organization interviewed numerous Belarusian elites in 2006 following the Belarusian presidential election. I use these sources combined with Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye's work on interdependence to frame how dependence and interdependence and the Belarusian national identity interplay to form Belarusian foreign policy. This research and analysis

contributes to academia through analysis of recent developments and stagnations in Belarusian foreign policy by evaluating trends primarily since the 2006 election. My research acts as a qualitative analysis of Belarusian foreign policy today and how it has transformed in the past 20 years since Lukashenka solidified his power in Belarus.

3. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of my research relies heavily upon the interrelated theories of dependence, dependency, and interdependence. These three concepts help unveil how Lukashenka deals with the question of dependency in Belarus through foreign policy.

3.1. State of Art

3.1.1. Interdependence

Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye wrote extensively about interdependence in their ground-breaking work *Power and Interdependence*. Written in 1989, they apply their theory primarily on the United States and it's the USA's relationship with other countries. Keohane and Nye begin by defining dependence because in order to understand interdependence it is necessary to understand dependence. According to Keohane and Nye dependence means "a state of being determined or significantly affected by external forces".¹ They then define interdependence as "mutual dependence". This means that countries are connected with each other and vulnerable to any changes outside the country. Most countries have something to offer another country and coexist in a globalized community that cannot become less connected. Dependence also is contingent

¹ Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence*, (USA: Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data, 1989), 8

upon what the country depends on from another foreign actor. Some goods are more important for national security than others. For instance, oil is more crucial to security than luxury goods.²

Every country today in this globalized world uses some type of independence. Dependence is not a desirable position and interdependence acts as a way to break out of dependence. Nevertheless, interdependence should not be seen as solely positive and a combatant against dependence. Keohane and Nye explicitly state that “interdependence will always involve costs because interdependence restricts autonomy”.³ Interdependency may restrict autonomy, but dependence would outright prevent autonomy so interdependency is still a preferable option for autonomy than dependence and a favorable position for the less powerful country to be in.

Under the theory of interdependence, domestic policy and foreign policy have a mutually beneficial relationship.⁴ Interdependence not only contributes to increased relations with foreign actors, but in turn leads to a more stable environment domestically. Keohane and Nye stress that interdependence does not ultimately decrease any problems within the international realm. Interdependence is not a zero-sum game. Power can increase simultaneously in each country, if the status-quo remains the same. Interdependence means mutual dependence; yet, interdependence does not lead to or even mean that each actor will mutually benefit each other equally.⁵ In the majority of cases,

² Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence*, (USA: Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data, 1989), 9

³ Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence*, (USA: Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data, 1989), 9

⁴ Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence*, (USA: Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data, 1989), 8

⁵ Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence*, (USA: Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data, 1989), 10

one country is rarely or never fully dependent on another country. There is a spectrum of dependence and interdependence, with essentially everyone having some degree of interdependence. Each country offers at least something to the other. Usually there is an unequal level of interdependence where one country is more dependent on the other and vice versa.⁶

Interdependence is not an alternative to dependence but instead a variation of dependence. Interdependence is not a way for a dependent to break out of dependence entirely but acts as a way for both partners to depend on each other in some way. The degree of dependence depends on the partner within the relationship. Within the context of globalization, most countries are offering at least something to their partners and alliances, either through trade or through ideological partnerships.

3.1.2. Further Research

Thomas Angotti, a dependency theorist, describes dependence within the context of Latin America. Due to economic differences, Latin American countries have had to rely on other countries with different economic systems more suitable to the current economic and international environment at present. Angotti defines dependency as a phenomenon where a dependent is contingent upon on a dominant country. The dominant country sees the dependent country as underdeveloped and itself as developed. The dominant country furthers this idea of underdevelopment by propagating an image of backwardness in the dependent country in order to suit their own needs, i.e. exploitation of labor and capital. The dominant country views this exploitation as necessary and “requires repression of independent nations in order to guarantee the export of capital.” Angotti believes that independence from foreign dominion is the cure for

⁶ Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence*, (USA: Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data, 1989), 11

underdevelopment and that underdevelopment is caused by external forces (the dominant country). Dependency theory accentuates the rejection of backwardness, analyses the belief that developed countries make up the “core” and are surrounded by a less-advanced dependent periphery, and that capital and labor in the dependent countries does not equal to the value produced for the dominant country.⁷ Scholar Tony Smith does not deny the importance of foreign influence in weaker states; however, he views the economic effect on the development in these relatively weaker states from the stronger ones as exaggerated. He essentially dismisses dependency theory as an “attempt at Marxism” and things that local circumstances factor more into the development of the “dependent” countries than imperialist or capitalism forces from the dominant countries.⁸

Dependency is prevalent in Latin American countries that have to deal with the hegemon of the United States as their big neighbor to the north. Belarus and other post-Soviet states must deal with dependency in their own way with Russia acting as their hegemon in the region. Despite a relatively higher degree of dependence of post-Soviet states on Russia, Belarus included, interdependency used as a means to break away from dependence does not exist in the post-Soviet space as much as it would seem. The countries in this space today seek their own personal goals in foreign relations. Trade unions and the Single Economic Space made it possible to lower tariffs and encourage trade within the region; however, fear of Russian hegemony created a situation where other countries seek economic interdependence through other means other than working

⁷ Thomas Angotti, “The Political Implications of Dependency Theory,” *Latin American Perspectives* 8, no. 3 (1981): 125-135

⁸ Tony Smith, “The Logic of Dependency Theory Revisited,” *International Organization* 35, no. 4 (1981): 761

solely with Russia.⁹ Yet, the benefits of economic dependence keep many countries happily reliant on Russia in exchange for political allegiance. The incentive to break out of dependence decreases when the benefits of staying in a relationship where the dependence is mutual, although not equal, remain greater than the costs. In summation, interdependence does not act as a tool to decrease dependence but instead is another form of dependence. My research explores Belarusian dependence and its reconciliation with how Belarusians see themselves at home and in relation to the rest of the world.

2. Literature Review

The current state of art surrounding multi-vectorism in Belarusian foreign policy is not vast. Belarus continues to be a mystery to most foreign and domestic scholars. Scholar Grigory Ioffe has written the most extensively about Belarus in many aspects such as language, political atmosphere, and foreign policy. Ioffe writes about how the west does not understand Belarus regarding its foreign policy and further, does not understand Belarus in general.¹⁰ Other scholars write about Lukashenka's regime and the national identity in Belarus and how this translates into the foreign policy of Belarus. National identity and Lukashenka's regime are at the forefront of inquisition in Belarus. Does Belarusian national identity even exist and how can the Belarusian people escape Lukashenka's alleged oppressive rule? My research does not seek to answer these questions but instead operates under the assumption that Belarusians have a distinct identity and is a manifestation of what the Belarusian people support. Instead of seeking

⁹ Alexander Libman, "Regionalization and Regionalism in the Post-Soviet Space: Current Status and Implications for Institutional Development," *Europe-Asia Studies* 59, no. 3 (2007): 401-430

¹⁰ Grigory Ioffe, *Understanding Belarus and How Western Foreign Policy Misses the Mark* (USA, 2008)

to resolve these questions about national identity and the Lukashenka regime, this research examines how Lukashenka uses the national character of the Belarusian people and their support to shape his policies. Priority attention to Lukashenka's regime is crucial since Belarus cannot be understood separate of understanding President Lukashenka and his regime. The Belarusian national identity as understood by Lukashenka contributes to shaping his foreign policy. Dependence and interdependence in Belarusian foreign policy is shaped by the national character of the Belarusian people.

2.1. Lukashenka's National Identity in Belarus

Various aspects of national identity in Belarus exist, albeit not a distinct language, religion, or history. The modern Belarusian state under the Lukashenka regime emphasizes certain aspects that contribute to Lukashenka's policy-making. These characteristics exist as part of Lukashenka's regime, but also it can be assumed that these characteristics are a reflection of how the Belarusian people see themselves and wish to be seen by others. These key characteristics are as follows: Soviet-nostalgia, "Little-Russianism".

2.1.1. Soviet-nostalgia

When Lukashenko became President in 1994, he almost immediately he abandoned the ideologies supporting Belarusian nationalism/nostalgia for the ancient Belarusian nation instead opting for policies in favor of nostalgia for the Belarus Socialist Republic. He reversed most privatization by re-nationalizing many large businesses that had been privatized and discarded national symbols in favor of reinstating Soviet symbols, for example restoring the socialist flag.¹¹

¹¹ Steven M. Eke and Taras Kuzio, "Sultanism in Eastern Europe: The Socio-Political Roots of Authoritarian Populism in Belarus," *Europe-Asia Studies* 52, no. 3 (2000): 526

2.1.2. “Little Russianism”

History emphasized how Belarusians were the purest of the East Slavs, maintaining their purity by avoiding occupation by either Turkish or Mongol forces, unlike the Ukrainians and Russians. Belarusian patriotism abandons the Grand Duchy past in favor of emphasizing the Soviet past. The official policy stresses Pan-Slavism and “Little Russianism”. One of the policies of Lukashenka almost instantly was reinstating textbooks that emphasized these two ideologies. Despite these connections with other Slavs, in 1922 the creation of the Belarusian Soviet Republic did not fuse Belarusians with Russians. However, the state was created before the nation and consequently, Belarus has always had a weak sense of national identity, only made weaker by the 1990s policies wishing for the “return to Eurasia”.¹²

Scholars Eke and Kuzio argue that the only pro-Russian force in Belarus is Lukashenka and Lukashenka is only popular among the people due to “mass political apathy, poverty, and lack of information”.¹³ Lukashenka support base largely comes from pensioners and the rural population, where the Belarusian government spends more than double on farm subsidies than even its giant neighbor, Russia, to the east. The support for Lukashenka varies throughout the country. There is an east-west divide and additionally a language divide, where in the west there is more support for the Belarusian independent nation and in the west there is more support for connections with Russia and the Soviet past. The issue of language in Belarus is a key element in its nation-building process where all attempts at making the Belarusian language the preferred language in Belarus were halted immediately by Lukashenka in favor of the Russian language. Now many

¹² Steven M. Eke and Taras Kuzio, “Sultanism in Eastern Europe: The Socio-Political Roots of Authoritarian Populism in Belarus,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 52, no. 3 (2000): 528

¹³ Steven M. Eke and Taras Kuzio, “Sultanism in Eastern Europe: The Socio-Political Roots of Authoritarian Populism in Belarus,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 52, no. 3 (2000): 532

Belarusians speak some hybrid form of Belarusian mixed with Russian, diffusing the divisions between Russian and Belarusian identities.

Eke and Kuzio describe the basis of Lukashenka's policies is an "irrational mix of policies, implemented in a random manner".¹⁴ The Soviet ideology and the emphasis on "little Russianism" do not coexist easily with Belarusian patriotism. A telling description of Lukashenka's policy in Belarus is that it is a "tango of convenience", where Lukashenka has no clear ruling ideology and is able to keep his interests relatively fluid depending on the situation at the time.¹⁵ The Soviet nostalgia and the stress on being and having been the best and purest east Slavs has worked well for Belarus in maintaining connections with Russia to the point of the pursuit of a union fusing the two countries either into one country or into partners with equal status. Lukashenka supported this unity while defending independence. A new federation with Russia could act as a way to preserve independence; otherwise Belarus would have to accept the consequences of independence, both positive and negative. This relationship with Russia worked well for Lukashenka as it saved the Belarusian economy in the 1990s; however, today the two countries have different goals economically, where Belarus looks to the Soviet past and somehow being more Russian than the Russians, as Russia looks to a post-Soviet and capitalist future.

Belarus deviated from typical post-soviet transitions in that there was no transition and the Belarus experiences international criticism because of this. Lukashenka looked at the transitions in other post-Soviet countries, particularly its close neighbors of Lithuania, Russia, and Ukraine as cautionary tales; Lithuania appeased the European Union and

¹⁴ Steven M. Eke and Taras Kuzio, "Sultanism in Eastern Europe: The Socio-Political Roots of Authoritarian Populism in Belarus," *Europe-Asia Studies* 52, no. 3 (2000): 536

¹⁵ Steven M. Eke and Taras Kuzio, "Sultanism in Eastern Europe: The Socio-Political Roots of Authoritarian Populism in Belarus," *Europe-Asia Studies* 52, no. 3 (2000): 526

seemed to be doing no better than Belarus with no transition, and Russia and Ukraine experienced wild capitalism, something that Belarus hoped to avoid.¹⁶ This deviation in transition entrusted Belarus and Lukashenka with a unique political regime. Matsuzato describes Lukashenka's regime as a populist one and that populists use ideologies instrumentally. This suggests that Lukashenka does not have a clear concrete ideology but instead uses specific ideologies that would support his regime and grant him support from the Belarusian people. One of the ideological methods in use by the Lukashenka's regime, especially in the 1990s, was anti-elitism.¹⁷ Anti-elitism became institutionalized and systematic, making it possible for Lukashenka to resist western pressure since the European Union, in his view, was comprised of elites trying to impose their will onto Belarus. Under Lukashenka's regime, Belarusian elites are more vulnerable than the opposition.¹⁸ Lukashenka does not focus on the opposition as much because it will cause international scrutiny, whereas the West does not seem to care much about large business owners being charged with tax evasion or whatever other allegations imposed against them in order to nationalize their companies. The Belarusian people see the opposition as evil and financed by foreigners and the Lukashenka is their populist protector against these elites trying to ruin Belarusian society.¹⁹ Anti-elite sentiment more than likely

¹⁶ Kimitaka Matsuzato, "A Populist Island in an Ocean of Clan Politics: The Lukashenka Regime as an Exception among CIS Countries," *Europe-Asia Studies* 56, no. 2 (2004): 240

¹⁷ Kimitaka Matsuzato, "A Populist Island in an Ocean of Clan Politics: The Lukashenka Regime as an Exception among CIS Countries," *Europe-Asia Studies* 56, no. 2 (2004): 238-239

¹⁸ Kimitaka Matsuzato, "A Populist Island in an Ocean of Clan Politics: The Lukashenka Regime as an Exception among CIS Countries," *Europe-Asia Studies* 56, no. 2 (2004): 256

¹⁹ Kimitaka Matsuzato, "A Populist Island in an Ocean of Clan Politics: The Lukashenka Regime as an Exception among CIS Countries," *Europe-Asia Studies* 56, no. 2 (2004): 240

already existed in the Belarusian people and Lukashenka's regime may just reflect this attitude already present in Belarus.

The next point Matsuzato makes is that the Belarusian mentality primed the population to be susceptible to populist promises due to their "lack of self-satirizing humor, easy-going buoyancy, and sound cynicism", which Russian and Ukrainians both have and why they transitioned differently than Belarus.²⁰ This suggests that the mentality of the Belarusian people, the fear of out-of-control capitalism, and anti-elitism all support the populist Lukashenka regime, ideologies that Lukashenka either uses for his own benefit or for the benefit of the Belarusian people by reflecting the needs and wants of the Belarusian people.

2.2. Opinions of Belarusian Elites

The elites in Belarus are not one indistinguishable group of people. The elites in Belarus have differing political views and scholars claim that regarding the Belarusian elites it is difficult to tell whether or not the views expressed by the elites are in fact their real views or if they are pretense. However, this is true in every aspect of humanity where there is no way to tell for certain if what someone reflects what they truly believe, not only among Belarusian elites. Prior to 2000, the Soviet elite still dominated Belarusian politics until they began aging and later new elites took hold. The original Soviet elite that still held influence even after Lukashenka came to power influenced Belarusian politics in that they had no desire to pursue a national rebirth and during the final days of the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic they had no interest in Belarusian independence. These same elites remained in influential spheres for another decade shaping the

²⁰ Kimitaka Matsuzato, "A Populist Island in an Ocean of Clan Politics: The Lukashenka Regime as an Exception among CIS Countries," *Europe-Asia Studies* 56, no. 2 (2004): 242

Belarusian identity and contributing to the Soviet nostalgia present in the Lukashenka regime. In 1994 after Lukashenka became president, there were factions of the elites who wanted to pursue a national revival but others who supported the post-Soviet nostalgia and a more authoritarian type regime in Belarus instead of democracy. One reason why they supported this regime instead of supporting a more pro-Belarusian nationalism course is due to pragmatic reasons such as Lukashenka offering high-paid positions to hardline communist supporters.²¹

Volha Abramava, Belarusian elite, believes that the Belarusian identity is closed and resistant to change. The political system in Belarus will not change because Belarusians do not want change, she proposes, and the only way for change to occur in Belarusian politics would be to completely overhaul the Belarusian national character, something that would take centuries to occur if this was even a viable option to the Belarusian people. Abramava insists that it is unacceptable that others do not accept the Belarusian character for what it is and instead continue to insist upon a change in the country that could not occur even if the political system in Belarus was open to it because of the mentality of the people. She believes that the Belarusian people are not radical in any aspects of their lives, and that this is reflected in the politics.²² Abramava's point is sound; however, it is difficult to say what it is exactly that the Belarusian people want, especially from democratic polities who claim that the voice of the Belarusian people cannot be heard since elections are not fair and not free. Iryna Buhrova, another Belarusian elite, on the other hand does not think that a Belarusian identity currently exists

²¹ Yauhen Babosau. "Should Belarus make a strategic Choice?" in *Belarus: Neither Europe, nor Russia*, ed. Valer Bulhakau and Agnieszka Komorowska (Warsaw: Stefan Batory Foundation, 2006), 221

²² Volha Abramava, "Does Belarusian Identity exist?" in *Belarus: Neither Europe, nor Russia*, ed. Valer Bulhakau and Agnieszka Komorowska (Warsaw: Stefan Batory Foundation, 2006), 111-112

it a completely solidified form. She claims that now finally Belarusians do want recognition in order to reinforce their identity in order for it to become solidified.²³ Belarusians can say who they are as much as they like and claim to have a certain identity, but this claim is moot unless outsiders recognize their identity as legitimate and worth taking seriously. It is important for Belarusians and any other nation to feel recognized by others because it is hard to take oneself seriously or recognize their own identity if everyone else tells them that they are wrong. For example, Belarusians feel they are Belarusian, yet outsiders tell them they are just an extension of Russia or that due to the Lukashenka regime, Belarusians are not able to be themselves anyway so their whole identity does not deserve acknowledgement. Dozens of Belarusian elites seek to describe what the Belarusian identity. The main descriptions are that Belarusians do not have an identity yet or maybe never will, Belarusians have an identity but the West and/or others do not want to accept this identity, and finally that the Belarusian identity is rooted more in Polish identity or Russian identity. Referring back to elite Abramava's point that the mentality of the people is reflected in politics and not the other way around, Abramava claims that Belarusians are cautious in their mentality and not radicals. This would explain the policies present in the Belarusian foreign policy, in which President Lukashenka does not want to make any concrete unions with any of its partners. Belarus keeps itself closed because some elites believe that is simply what the Belarusians want and they are hesitant to accept outside influence, although they are at times forced to. Henadz Buraukin states that "Belarusian identity seems to exist" but even so their "sense" of identity does not exist like it does for other nations because they do not respect

²³ Iryna Buhrova, "Does Belarusian Identity exist?" in *Belarus: Neither Europe, nor Russia*, ed. Valer Bulhakau and Agnieszka Komorowska (Warsaw: Stefan Batory Foundation, 2006), 114

themselves and their national symbols. Further, he thinks that although the politicians try to reflect what the people want, i.e. caution when dealing with others and closedness, in rhetoric, in reality they are a part of a globalization trend towards cosmopolitanism, in lieu of the mentality of the Belarusian people, which would want the opposite if they are in fact as closed as some elites claim they are.²⁴

Andrey Sannikau strongly believes that the only way for the Belarusian identity to flourish would be to join the European Union and become more strongly integrated with the polity. Currently, Western organizations and governments support Belarusian nationalism as a means to encourage Belarus to become a more open society, sway the country away from Russia, and motivate Belarus to work more closely with the EU. Hypothetically the closer that Belarus becomes to the EU and the more cooperative Belarus is to working with the EU, the less the EU would support nationalism in Belarus. This is the typical pattern among the EU is that they supported nationalisms in countries in order for the country to become more open and willing to work with the EU and then later after integration the support for nationalism disappears and nationalism becomes an undesirable quality. This would be no different in Belarus. Belarusian elites who think that the survival and revival of the Belarusian identity depends on a close relationship with the EU are only looking at the short-sighted goal instead of what would happen in the long term. The national revivals so crucial in the Czech Republic and Poland for example are no longer encouraged like they were during the break-up of the Soviet Union and instead became problematic for older EU member-states. At present for nationalists, Europe remains a dream and idyllic place where once Belarus returns to Europe, the

²⁴ Henadz Buraukin, "Does Belarusian Identity exist?" in *Belarus: Neither Europe, nor Russia*, ed. Valer Bulhakau and Agnieszka Komorowska (Warsaw: Stefan Batory Foundation, 2006), 117

Belarusian identity will finally be able to flourish. This may be, but many of the nationalists do not think about what the long-term consequences for the Belarusian identity would be to integrate with the EU. Many Belarusians instead view Europe as a viable option for trade and other pragmatic reasons but not as a cultural or political partner.²⁵

Lukashenka's regime strongly emphasizes Soviet nostalgia and has since the 1990s when Lukashenka first became president. Even so, the general consensus among the Belarusian elites is that they and the Belarusian people in general do not feel a sense of Soviet comradeship as much as they do a shared connection with other Slavs like the Czechs, Poles, or even Croatians. Even so, the connection with other Slavs does not overshadow the fact that the Belarusians see themselves as distinct in the Slavic world, like any other Slavic people.

What Belarus lacks is a clear set of defining characteristics designated to the Belarusian people that distinguish the country from other Slavic nations. Belarusians can feel a difference between themselves and other Slavs but they do not know how to clearly describe this difference. This is problematic because then if they do not have their own description of themselves, then other people might dismiss the Belarusian identity as not existing. And if a definition of Belarusian identity does not exist by the Belarusians, others will try to define the nation for them, as many already have done. What Lukashenka has done is taken the void of a concrete national identity and try to formulate a Belarusian

²⁵ Andrey Sannikau, "Does Belarusian Identity exist?" in *Belarus: Neither Europe, nor Russia*, ed. Valer Bulhakau and Agnieszka Komorowska (Warsaw: Stefan Batory Foundation, 2006), 102

identity that may very well reflect the needs and wants of the Belarusian people but also perhaps coincidentally helps to secure his own regime and interests.

2.3. Belarusian National Identity and its Relation to Foreign Policy

Analyst Natalia Leshchenko discusses the basis for foreign policy in Belarus. She argues that Belarusian foreign policy is rooted in the national ideology of Belarus, which is based on collectivism, anti-liberalism, and not ethnically based. Lukashenka created this national ideology to help cement his own power and uses it to his advantage depending on the situation at hand. The core of Lukashenka's regime is that he wants to protect the country's national ideology against foreign influences. He uses rhetoric to describe the threat of the European Union to the sovereignty of Belarus. Pressure from the West for Belarus to adopt a democratic regime only strengthens Lukashenka's political power. Lukashenka views market reforms and democracy as alien to the national ideology for Belarus, opted out of the path to democracy unlike other post-soviet states, and uses national sovereignty as a shield against the west.²⁶

Lukashenka also uses this national ideology towards foreign relations with Russia. Lukashenka kept close relations with Russia from 1994 onwards. The close relationship with Russia fit the national narrative Lukashenka was propagating, based on history and Soviet nostalgia. The partnership with Russia was an ideological partnership for Lukashenka without any concrete economic ties. In 2007 Russia changed its tone and decided to adopt a more economic and pragmatic approach in its foreign policy and decided to raise gas and oil prices for Belarus. Because the close relationship with Russia was based on ideology, Belarus was able to change its narrative and loosen its ties to

²⁶ Natalia Leshchenko, "The National Ideology and the Basis of the Lukashenka Regime in Belarus," *Europe-Asia Studies* 60, no. 8 (2008): 1420

Russia and gain sympathy from the west. All of these actions are based on Lukashenka's desire to keep power through claiming to protect the national ideology of Belarus. This keeps the foreign policy of Belarus fluid and changeable, able to fit the needs of whatever will grant Lukashenka more popular support. Leshchenko concludes by stating that Belarus is now searching for other sources of economic sustainability, as it can no longer rely solely on Russia, despite never being directly dependent on Russia.²⁷

2.4. Concluding Remarks on Belarusian National Identity

Scholars acknowledge the interplay between Belarusian national identity and policy-making. The national identity in Belarus has not been concretely defined but there are certain characteristics that seem to define the Belarusian people, although not typical distinguishing characteristics like language or religion. The key features of Belarusian identity are Soviet-nostalgia, "Little Russianism", and a general resistance to change in the Belarusian mentality. There are, of course, many other characteristics of the Belarusian people. Nevertheless, these features seem to have the most impact on Lukashenka and his regime and can be seen manifested into Belarus' foreign policy.

5. Multi-Vectors in Foreign Policy

The official foreign policy of Belarus is a multi-vector approach. Belarus seeks cooperation with every continent, even in light of tense diplomatic relations between Belarus and some other polities. For example, Belarus maintains that it encourages cooperation with the United States and that all issues between the two countries were first initiated by and continue due to the United States government, although the official policy

²⁷ Natalia Leshchenko, "The National Ideology and the Basis of the Lukashenka Regime in Belarus," *Europe-Asia Studies* 60, no. 8 (2008): 1431

does not state the roots of the issues the United States has with the Belarusian government. In the mid-2000s, many changes occurred in Belarus regarding its foreign policy. In 2006-2007, Belarus and Russia had a conflict regarding oil and gas prices, causing a blow to the relations between the two countries. During this same period, Belarus began strengthening its ties with Latin American countries and with China. Additionally, in 2006 the United States and other western countries imposed sanctions on Belarusian companies. These issues with the big powers of both the West and Russia and the new developments in relationships with other regions suggests some correlation. With the European Union, the United States, and CIS, Belarus states that it wants to have mutually beneficially relations with them based on respect, equality, and cooperation with each other. Belarus clearly states this because due to its size, location, and history, Belarus often falls into the role of dependency and today seeks to be considered as an equal in its relationship with others. Lukashenka demonstrates this by holding firm with his policies despite sometimes intense pressure from the international community. Although not a member, Belarus states it cooperates with the European Union, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and NATO.²⁸²⁹

5.1. Belarus and Russia

Although also a member-state of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Ministry of Foreign affairs of Belarus defines its relationship with Russia separately from the rest of CIS. The two countries have a special relationship that differs from

²⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus. "Foreign Policy of the Republic of Belarus." Mfa.gov.by. <http://mfa.gov.by/en/courtiers/russia/> (Accessed May 19, 2016)

²⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus. "Our Relations with United States and Latin American countries." Mfa.gov.by. <http://mfa.gov.by/en/courtiers/america/> (Accessed May 19, 2016)

Belarus' relationship with any other polity in the world. The official policy acknowledges all of the factors contributing to the relationship between Belarus and Russia and why the two are so interconnected and how Belarus plans to maintain this connection, but in a way where Belarus is not entirely dependent on Russia, or at least does not *appear* to be dependent. As stated by the Ministry of Foreign affairs of Belarus “an extensive mutual agenda is determined by a set of geographical, geopolitical, historical and other factors, complementarity of the two economies, and close cooperation between our enterprises”.³⁰ I give special attention to this relationship due to its significance.

5.1.1. Belarus-Russia Relations in depth

Bilateral relations with Russia are stronger than the bilateral relations of Belarus with any other country.³¹ Belarus is not only connected to Russia economically, but also Belarus and Russia are vastly interconnected through military cooperation, free borders between the two countries, and they share the same language.³² For over 200 years Belarus and Russia belonged to the same political body until Belarus became an independent country in 1993. Since then, the relationship between Belarus and Russia has been complex and appear to be a love/hate relationship where on one hand Belarusians and Russians realize that they are brothers and deeply connected with each other, but on the other hand sometimes they are not very pleased with this connection. Belarus does not want to be politically dependent on Russia and appears to have a little brother complex, whereas Russia has an air of arrogance towards Belarus where Russia knows

³⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus. “Russia and the Union State.” Mfa.gov.by. <http://mfa.gov.by/en/courtiers/russia/> (Accessed May 17, 2016)

³¹ Grigory Ioffe, *Understanding Belarus and How Western Foreign Policy Misses the Mark* (USA, 2008), 156

³² Grigory Ioffe, *Understanding Belarus and How Western Foreign Policy Misses the Mark* (USA, 2008), 156

that Belarus is economically dependent on Russia and thus acts accordingly. Throughout the 1990s, the countries were extremely close and their economies flourished together, more so because of Russia than because of Belarus, but the two countries had common goals and a common approach for achieving these goals. Things changed in the 2000s after Russia developed a more pragmatic approach to its foreign policy and wanted to cut back on the perks it was giving to its neighbors in order to retain more money in its own economy. For Belarus, a pragmatic foreign policy is being connected with Russia economically. However, this approach fails to be practical when Russia takes its own practical approach to Belarus. In order to understand the foreign policy of Belarus, it is necessary to review the interconnectedness of the Belarusian economy with Russia. Starting in the mid-1990s, Economic growth in Belarus has been highly dependent on a special relationship with Russia. In 1994, economic ties with Russia with severed but in 1996 they were once again restored and this marked huge economic growth in Belarus.³³ In 1991 Belarus became an independent nation but the rest of the 1990s marked a period of “reintegration” with Russia.³⁴ Lukashenka was quite popular at the time and a big advocate for integration with Russia and later a union, realizing he had a high chance against Yeltsin of gaining a powerful position within the union.³⁵ However, after 2001 Lukashenka abandoned many of the concrete measures he promised regarding the union, i.e. a single monetary system. Lukashenka further prevented Russian business owners from buying their way into Belarusian industries.³⁶ Ioffe views the reason behind the

³³ Grigory Ioffe, *Understanding Belarus and How Western Foreign Policy Misses the Mark* (USA, 2008), 110-111

³⁴ Grigory Ioffe, *Understanding Belarus and How Western Foreign Policy Misses the Mark* (USA, 2008), 157

³⁵ Grigory Ioffe, *Understanding Belarus and How Western Foreign Policy Misses the Mark* (USA, 2008), 158

³⁶ Grigory Ioffe, *Understanding Belarus and How Western Foreign Policy Misses the Mark* (USA, 2008), 159

demotivation for the Union State as stemming from Belarus' coming into its own as its own nation and using its close ties with Russia to its own advantage while simultaneously weakening Russia's influence on Belarus.³⁷

Arguably the source of Belarusian economic success can be attributed to the preferential gas and oil prices granted to Belarus from Russia.³⁸ Lukashenka counts on Russian subsidies, either direct or indirect, and uses his transit location as a bargaining chip.³⁹ Belarus is crucially dependent on imports of energy from one source—Russia, and Belarus has a higher rate of energy usage than other former republics such as Ukraine. Belarus relies on Russia for industrial exports, is almost 100% dependent on Russia for gas, and is about 90% dependent on Russia for oil imports.⁴⁰

Export is one example of Belarus' relationship with Russia and the vast percentage of products that are exported to Russia. Export is a big component of the Belarusian economy. In 2005, exports in Belarus accounted for 54% of its GDP. Belarus is active within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in general, but is particularly active in its participation with Russia. Within the CIS, Russia receives 80.6% of the exports from Belarus. Not only does Belarus export the majority of its products to Russia, most of Belarus' imports come from Russia accounting for 90.8% of its imports coming from Russia. After receiving many raw materials and semi-finished products from Russia, Belarus then exports finished value-added products to Russia. Belarus exports to

³⁷ Grigory Ioffe, *Understanding Belarus and How Western Foreign Policy Misses the Mark* (USA, 2008), 161-162

³⁸ Grigory Ioffe, *Understanding Belarus and How Western Foreign Policy Misses the Mark* (USA, 2008), 119

³⁹ Grigory Ioffe, *Understanding Belarus and How Western Foreign Policy Misses the Mark* (USA, 2008), 128

⁴⁰ Grigory Ioffe, *Understanding Belarus and How Western Foreign Policy Misses the Mark* (USA, 2008), 113

Russia because Belarusian products are not as competitive in the West as they are in Russia so in this sense there is no reason for Belarus to reorient its trade relations and additionally no want by the West either. By means of the capital acquired through exporting to Russia, this allows the necessary capital for Belarusians to participate in Western markets. This is significant for Belarus has it allows for less dependence on Russia. Advantageous for Russia, Belarus also acts as a significant transit country for oil and gas from Russia transported to the European Union where 50% of oil products and 20% of gas exported from Russia to the European Union goes through Belarus.⁴¹ In sum, Belarusian industries are all deeply integrated with Russia. Belarus is a key producer of fuel for Europe and is a large producer of machinery and radio electronics. Belarusian industries are all deeply integrated with Russia as Belarus depends on some raw materials and on parts/semi-finished products imported from Russia. Some industries are also highly attached to some major Russian consumers.⁴²

The special bond between Belarus and Russia has changed in recent decades after each country adopted different paths during transition. Russia is no longer a “source of inspiration” for Belarus since Russia has moved on to more pragmatic approaches in its foreign policy, even with Belarus. On the contrary, the transition from communism to capitalism in Russia acts as an image of what Belarus hopes to avoid. Additionally, Russia seeks to work with many Western political and financial groups in order to benefit themselves.⁴³ Russia does not view itself as being an equal with Belarus. Russia was outraged that the European Union continues the attempt to treat Russia the same as

⁴¹ Grigory Ioffe, *Understanding Belarus and How Western Foreign Policy Misses the Mark* (USA, 2008), 115-116

⁴² Grigory Ioffe, *Understanding Belarus and How Western Foreign Policy Misses the Mark* (USA, 2008), 108

⁴³ Grigory Ioffe, *Understanding Belarus and How Western Foreign Policy Misses the Mark* (USA, 2008), 145

Belarus, and other countries such as Moldova and countries in North Africa.⁴⁴ The Union State between Russia and Belarus has not been successful as Russia based the Union State on economic principles and Belarus based the union on political principles.⁴⁵

The change in the relationship between Belarus and Russia is apparent in the 2006/2007 oil crisis between the two countries. In 2006 there was an investment boom in Belarus, of which only 3% was foreign investment. This investment boom was conditional on the direct and indirect subsidies from Russia, ranging anywhere from \$3 billion up to \$10 billion. At the end of 2006, Russia decided to cut back on subsidies, in part because Russia realized that Belarus was exchanging empty promises for financial aid. Yegor Gaidar, a Russian economist, described Belarus as a self-imposed burden on Russia. Belarus received many special benefits from Russia, especially regarding gas and oil. Belarus is still dependent on Russia for cheap oil and gas prices, which amount to savings contributing to 41% of the Belarusian budget; however, the prices are much higher now than they were in prior to 2006/2007.⁴⁶ The gas and oil dilemma in 2007 left Belarus with western sympathy.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, still there is close military cooperation between Russia and Belarus and Russia has attempted to gain control of the parts of the Belarusian defense industry. Over the past 15 years, Belarus has enjoyed good gas prices and deliveries of crude oil without customs duties. Since 2007, Russia has focused more

⁴⁴ Elana Wilson Rowe and Stina Torjesen, eds, *The Multilateral Dimension in Russian Foreign policy*, (Routledge, 2008): 91

⁴⁵ Elana Wilson Rowe and Stina Torjesen, eds, *The Multilateral Dimension in Russian Foreign policy*, (Routledge, 2008): 173

⁴⁶ Grigory Ioffe, *Understanding Belarus and How Western Foreign Policy Misses the Mark* (USA, 2008), 119-124

⁴⁷ Elana Wilson Rowe and Stina Torjesen, eds, *The Multilateral Dimension in Russian Foreign policy*, (Routledge, 2008): 93

on its own self-interests instead of working in a way to sway Belarus from aligning with the West.⁴⁸

5.2. Belarus and CIS

“The development of bilateral cooperation with the CIS member states is one of the priorities of the foreign policy and foreign economic relations of the Republic of Belarus. These priorities are based on a number of historical, economic, political and cultural factors”, states the official foreign policy page of Belarus. The headquarters for CIS is in Minsk. Belarus is a member of many organizations that include CIS member states such as the Customs Union, EurAsEc, the Union State, and the Single Economic Space. Through these organizations Belarus enjoys a wide array of economic benefits, so despite its multi-vector approach to foreign policy, trade remains very high within this region.⁴⁹

Belarus still remains very active within the CIS with trade. Since 1995, over half of the trade turnover in Belarus has been with CIS. Between Belarus and Russia, trade turnover has decreased about 12% between 2000 and 2005; however, imports remain high from Russia, whereas Belarusian exports to Russia are rapidly declining. Belarus is exceptional in this case among other CIS members. Trade turnover with the European Union between 1995 and 2005 has increased slightly, but remains at about 30%. Trade

⁴⁸ Elana Wilson Rowe and Stina Torjesen, eds, *The Multilateral Dimension in Russian Foreign policy*, (Routledge, 2008): 113-114

⁴⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus. “Belarus and CIS countries and Georgia.” Mfa.gov.by. <http://mfa.gov.by/en/courtiers/cis/> (Accessed May 17, 2016)

turnover between Belarus and Asia between 1995 and 2005 increased from about 2% to over 4%.⁵⁰

5.3. Belarus and Africa/Asia

Belarus has diplomatic relations with the majority of African countries, hoping to expand its export market to the continent. Additionally, Belarus has diplomatic relations with many Middle Eastern countries. Despite extensive cooperation with China in recent years, China is surprisingly absent from the foreign policy section devoted to Africa and Asia, which only concentrates on Africa and the Middle East.⁵¹

6.3.1. China

Despite the lack of any mention of China by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Belarus, various news sources continue to cover Belarus' growing relationship with China. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belarus does explicitly mention the China-Belarus Industrial Park, "Great Stone". The idea for this park came way in 2010. Belarus and China are working together to create this park, which will be located near Minsk, in order to attract investment. The park ought to be attractive to investors due to its special legal status which would make business less complicated for those living in the area. The project in itself is slightly confusing. It is not clear if this is meant to be a residential community as well or what type of businesses that Belarus/China hopes to attract. The benefit for Belarus is that this park allows for Chinese capital to flow to Belarus as they are both working together on this project, but the benefits for Chinese investors are not entirely clear either. Perhaps this is a way for the Chinese government to try and make its

⁵⁰ Elana Wilson Rowe and Stina Torjesen, eds, *The Multilateral Dimension in Russian Foreign policy*, (Routledge, 2008): 168-169

⁵¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus. "Asia and Africa." Mfa.gov.by. http://mfa.gov.by/en/courtiers/asia_africa/ (Accessed May 17, 2016)

way into Europe, starting first in Belarus and making its way further in to other countries. China will invest more than triple of that of Belarus (\$1.5 billion to 500 million, respectively). Both China and Belarus will govern the park. The latest developments in this park were in 2013 and it appears that nothing concrete has yet taken place regarding investment or even construction. Lukashenka supports this project and thinks it will boost the economy of Belarus. The implications of a project like this remain to be seen as this could have adverse effects on Belarus from Russia, on whom Belarus still has, at the very least, some degree of dependence.⁵²

This is not the only project underway between Belarus and China. The two countries also have a visa-free travel agreement and Belarus cooperates with the Shanghai Cooperation Agreement (SCO), of which it is not a member. Including Belarus, all the members of the SCO are also members of EurAsEC, excluding Uzbekistan and China. This means that Belarus has strong connections with the members of SCO and its own prerogatives for working with the organization.^{53,54}

5.5. Belarus and the Americas

Cooperation between Belarus and Latin America has been steadily increasing since the mid-2000s. Official policy in Belarus describes cooperation with Latin America as necessary in a multi-vectored world. Belarus views cooperation politically and

⁵² International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC). "Great Stone Industrial Park." [Www.Industrialpark.by](http://www.industrialpark.by/en/about/). <http://www.industrialpark.by/en/about/> (Accessed May 17, 2016)

⁵³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, "Belarus and China relations will develop in Future," Mfa.gov.by http://mfa.gov.by/en/press/news_mfa/a362980855faaf8b.html (Accessed May 18, 2016)

⁵⁴ Vadzim Smok, "Belarus-China Relations: More Hype Than Substance?" Belarusdigest.com. <http://belarusdigest.com/story/belarus-china-relations-more-hype-substance-22795> (Accessed May 18, 2016)

economically with Latin America as a starting point for integration into the world trade networks. There is a perceived connection between Belarus and Latin America in that both hold similar positions within the United Nations. Additionally, the type and structure of their economies complement each other. One of the main partners in Latin America for Belarus is Venezuela, described as “fruitful cooperation”. Belarusian companies and enterprises in oil extraction and heavy machinery construction are currently present in Venezuela. Furthermore, Belarus opened two schools named after Venezuelan national heroes and in 2009 opened a Venezuelan cultural center in Minsk. Belarus also has a strong partnership with Brazil. Belarus views Latin America as a “viable alternative to [their] traditional markets” and seeks long-term partnerships, despite the region needing “substantial material and intellectual resources” for market development. Belarusian exports to the region appear to be the main connection between the Belarus and Latin America.⁵⁵ Former president of Venezuela Hugo Chavez pursued an anti-American coalition with countries such as Russia, China, Iran, and also Belarus. Chavez did not view the relationship with Belarus as crucial for pragmatic reasons but more so in his pursuit of an alliance of countries with leftist ideals against the United States. The tense relationship between Belarus and the United States and the EU made this relationship with Venezuela all the more attractive for Belarus. The demands of the USA and the EU for Belarus to radically change its government and for Lukashenka’s regime to end

⁵⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus. “Our Relations with United States and Latin American countries.” Mfa.gov.by.
<http://mfa.gov.by/en/courtiers/america/> (Accessed May 17, 2016)

allowed for Belarus to seek another direction in its foreign policy and demonstrate that it would not appease Western governments.⁵⁶⁵⁷

5.5.1. United States

The United States is the biggest critic of Belarus and Lukashenka's regime. Various leaders from the United States have described Belarus as tyranny, evil, and a dictatorship. The official policy supports democratization and free elections. In the economic sector, the United States supports Belarus becoming market economy as the current economic situation of Belarus makes for a "challenging business environment". Belarus claims the United States as a strong partner in trade, but acknowledges the political tensions between the two countries, although emphasizes it is on the side of the United States and that Belarus remains open to working together with the United States.⁵⁸

The release of political prisoners signifies that Belarus still does have some dependence and is subject to external pressures. The releasing of political prisoners happened after Belarus publically announced that it supported the Ukrainian revolution and the new president, Petro Poroshenko.⁵⁹ This is an example of Belarus teetering between Russia and the west and Lukashenka using the current political climate in the world to his own advantage to support the needs of Belarus. Lukashenka saw the

⁵⁶ Joshua Kucera, "What is Hugo Chavez Up To?," *The Wilson Quarterly* 35, no 2. (2011): 22-25, 29

⁵⁷ Yuras Karmanau. "Venezuela Calls for Partnership with Belarus." *The Washington Post*. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/06/29/AR2007062901671.html>. (Accessed May 18, 2016)

⁵⁸ U.S. Department of State. "U.S. Relations with Belarus." [www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5371.htm). <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5371.htm> (Accessed May 17, 2016)

⁵⁹ Grigorij Meseznikov, "Release of political prisoners: a lot of questions and one answer," Charter97.org. <https://charter97.org/en/news/2015/9/16/169244/> (Accessed May 19, 2016)

opportunity to potentially gain some financial support from the European Union and indeed many sanctions were lifted against Belarus.

5.6. Belarus and the European Union

Belarus has an important relationship with the European Union, where it views itself as providing extensive security to the EU and Belarus describes itself as a transit country, ensuring safe transit of oil and gas from Russia to the European Union. Belarus emphasizes the “development of friendly, equal and mutually beneficial relations with the EU Member States” as the European Union is the second biggest export market for Belarus after Russia. However, Belarus official policy acknowledges the political tensions and economic difficulties. Furthermore, Belarus does not enjoy preferential tariff rates from the European Union so exporting to the EU proves to be more expensive than exporting to countries with which Belarus has partnerships with, i.e. many CIS countries, particularly Russia. Belarus’ main prerogative in the EU currently is to increase investments in Belarus by setting up information networks in different countries throughout the European Union.⁶⁰

5.6.1. European Union Policy towards Belarus

Officially, the European Union’s bases its foreign policy to Belarus on the Eastern Partnership, which is a partnership between the European Union and 6 other countries, Belarus included. The EU supports democracy and market economies within this partnership; however, due to political issues the EU has with Belarus, Belarus receives special treatment from the EU, different than the other members of the Eastern

⁶⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus. “Our relations with countries of Europe.” Mfa.gov.by. <http://mfa.gov.by/en/courtiers/europe/> (Accessed May 17, 2016)

Partnership. The European Union's policy towards Belarus is markedly different than Belarus' policy towards the European Union. Belarus emphasizes economic cooperation and wishes to increase investment from European Union countries in Belarus, strengthen its already existing strong trade partners such as Germany, Poland, and the Netherlands, and create new strong relations with and encourage investment with other EU member-states such as the Czech Republic. In contrast, the policy of the European Union towards states that due to concerns about human rights, the European Union has a "policy of critical engagement" towards Belarus. There is no mention of economic cooperation besides that the European Union's made priority financially is to continue to fund civil society. The European Union sees Belarus as non-democratic and in need of serious reform in most spheres of political life. The European Union demands that the Belarusian government releases political prisoners (which Belarus has done), abolishes the death penalty, and establishes a democratic government. The concern of the European Union lies with the Belarusian people, whom the European Union sees as repressed, not free, and living in a country that has not undergone modernization.⁶¹ Individual member-states of the European Union also have their own policies towards Belarus. The Netherlands, for example, invested nearly 2 billion US dollars in Belarus in 2014 alone. The Netherlands is a huge trading partner with Belarus. The Netherlands works with Belarus financially but still emphasizes its concern on human rights in Belarus and the official granting of funds to Belarus is only done under the stipulation that the funds support civil social and the support of a "pluralist democratic society"; although, the Netherlands' policy states that merely that *initiatives* towards these goals must be put into place, not

⁶¹ European External Action Service. "EU Relations with Belarus." Eeas.europa.eu. http://eeas.europa.eu/belarus/index_en.htm (Accessed May 17, 2016)

necessarily that these requirements be fulfilled.⁶² The difference between the two policies is striking. Belarus maintains that it seeks mutually beneficial relations with the European Union and demands respect. Belarusian foreign policy glosses over the fact that the perceived issue of human rights is what deters the development of economic relations with the European Union and instead attributes the lagging of economic improvement is due to the weakening of the Euro-zone and a bad investment climate in general. The European Union, on the other hand, strongly emphasizes what they view as a lack of freedom and democracy in Belarus and feel this is an issue that must be resolved immediately. The foreign policy towards Belarus from the EU involves sanctions against individuals and companies, financial support to civil society, and pressure for political reforms. Some sanctions have recently been lifted after the release of political prisoners in Belarus.

5.7. Summary of Multi-Vector Foreign Policy

Belarus uses a multi-vector approach in order to create new connections. The political implications of these connections are clear and the reason behind the interdependence used by Belarus in order to create another realm in which countries with similar interests can operate outside of the sphere of western influence. Belarus' relationship with Russia is more complicated. Belarus is already deeply entrenched in Russia's sphere of influence and prior to the 2000s at least, had in practice (although not officially) a uni-vector approach to foreign policy pointing in the direction of Russia. A uni-vector policy relying on one influential neighbor left Belarus vulnerable and in a state

⁶² Government of the Netherlands, "Relations between the Netherlands and Belarus," Government.nl. <https://www.government.nl/topics/international-relations/contents/belarus> (Accessed May 19,2016)

of dependence. The dependence, or rather the susceptibility of Belarus to Russia's foreign policies, left Belarus in a position where it did not know the future of the state of affairs in Belarus. Russia did not want to give Belarus or other neighbors *as* preferential of treatment as it had in the past (though still preferential treatment). When trying to establish new connections it is impossible to do this without having economic stability. Belarus developed its economic stability in the 1990s through Russia. There is no denial that without reconnecting the ties with Russia in the 1990s, Belarus would not have seen as much, or perhaps any, economic success. There is a cycle of dependence and interdependence.

The two vectors with the most influence on Belarus and with whom Belarus interacts the most are the west (primarily the EU) and Russia. The political pressure exerted on Belarus has caused Belarus to appease some demands from the EU and the United States, for example the release of political prisoners in Belarus. Belarus' interest in encouraging investment from EU countries and increasing economic relations as whole with the European Union caused Belarus to enter into a realm of dependence on the EU. The role of interdependence in Belarusian foreign policy is clear. The United States and the European Union both exert political pressure on Belarus in order to try and coerce Belarus into changing its regime to something that these polities want. Russia does the same thing. The reliance on outside actors does not correspond to the goals of the official policy of Belarus foreign policy or mutually respectful partnerships.⁶³

⁶³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus. "Foreign Policy of the Republic of Belarus." Mfa.gov.by. <http://mfa.gov.by/en/courtiers/russia/> (Accessed May 19, 2016)

5.7.1. Opinions of Belarusian Elite on Relations with Europe (EU)

Elite Usevalad Yancheuski blatantly states that the European Union does not have any interest in understanding Belarus and simply looks down upon the country. He states that Belarusians do not need the EU and do not care about any sanctions or restrictions that the EU granted to Belarus. Belarusians do not care because they do not need help from the European Union and simply like the system they have in place. He describes the stance of the EU towards Belarus as coming from a position of arrogance, that is the European Union thinks that the Belarusian government came to be only by accident and that the Belarusian people would give anything for Belarusian society to open up, abandon its Sovietesque regime, and finally be able to experience all the wonders associated with having a close relationship with the EU. Yancheuski emphasizes that Belarusians simply do not care about having a close relationship with Europe, neither ideologically nor even pragmatically.⁶⁴ He is not the only elite in Belarus who feels this way with the majority of those interviewed in 2006 following the presidential election by the Stefan Batory Foundation, a foundation “guided by principles of transparency and accountability”.⁶⁵ A common view among the elites is that the EU does not have a clear policy towards Belarus. They are under the impression that the EU and the United States merely adopted a stance in 1996 and have not adapted this stance since then. The system in Belarus has been in place for over 20 years and many Belarus elites think that it is time for Western polities to finally accept that this whether or not this regime is what every

⁶⁴ Usevalad Yancheuski. “What do you think of the European Union’s policies with regard to Belarus?” in *Belarus: Neither Europe, nor Russia*, ed. Valer Bulhakau and Agnieszka Komorowska (Warsaw: Stefan Batory Foundation, 2006), 214

⁶⁵ Stefan Batory Foundation. “Mission Statement”. www.batory.org. http://www.batory.org.pl/en/about_the_foundation/mission_statement (Accessed May 17, 2016)

Belarusian wants, the system is not changing any time soon and Lukashenka is not going away, despite the constant futile attempts of the United States and the European Union to influence and shape the Belarusian government in a way that would better suit their interests.

Scholar Andrey Kazakevich describes the “European path” as merely being hypothetical and not a real issue in Belarusian politics because the regime has no intention to pursue a stronger relationship with the European Union for reasons other than to attract investment in Belarus or support a stronger trade relationship between the two polities. Belarusians see themselves as a part of Europe geographically but only in this way. There is no question as to whether or not Belarus is a part of Europe; however, Belarus does not belong to or want to belong to the ideological Europe and its set of values and culture and the elites do not think Belarus belongs to Europe in this sense. For today’s youth Europe is a synonym for the European Union and the post-Soviet elite feels positive towards Europe as an economic partner but this as far as these elites want to work with the EU. Russia remains as the cultural and traditional partner for Belarus but many are willing to work with the EU if it will lead to economic cooperation. After the breakup of the Soviet Union and a revival of Russian nationalism in Russia, a national movement among some elites in opposition to the post-Soviet elites arose in order to shield Belarus from the potential threat of Russia trying to spread its Russianism to Belarus. The national revival in Russia expressed itself mainly as pan-Russianism according to Kazakevich and led to pro-European sentiment among some in Belarus as a shield towards this potential pan-Russianism. Until 1994, the national elites and the Soviet elites worked together, but the national movement was more successful until Lukashenka came to power. Soviet symbols instead replaced the national symbols that the Soviet and national elites had agreed upon

and since 1996 the nationalists have not been allowed in the Belarusian government.⁶⁶ Most Belarusian elites are neither hard-line communists and Soviet-sympathizers nor pro-Western oppositional elites. The majority of elites in Belarus have views all along this spectrum but voice that they are in favor of the views that correspond to the system in place. These elites seized the opportunity to receive preferential treatment by being friends of Lukashenka or having other connections that enabled them to slowly advance. This demonstrates that people are often more motivated by pragmatic reasons than by ideological ones since many Belarusian elites are willing to say whatever they have to say in order to make more money. These elites are much more similar to the Soviet elites in that they share the same stance on Europe being a geographical notion more so than a place that Belarus shares the same politics or culture. This clash is evident in how the two polities interact with each other. The European Union has specific demands of Belarus to change its political system but Belarus does not want to change and stresses that the EU, and more so the United States, are trying to impose their will upon the Belarus instead of acknowledging and accepting that Belarus has chosen to take a different path than the EU. Kazakevich views the foreign policy of Belarus as showing no signs of changing due to the cynical attitude of young people towards the EU. These young people are not just cynical because of propaganda from the Belarusian government but they themselves do not want to deal with the EU and all its problems. Most young people do not see Europe as this idyllic place that Belarus will hopefully “return” to. Even the nationalistic elites views integrating with Europe as a pragmatic approach to protect Belarus from Russian

⁶⁶ Andrey Kazakevich, “Four corporations of Belarusian elite” in *Belarus: Neither Europe, nor Russia*, ed. Valer Bulhakau and Agnieszka Komorowska (Warsaw: Stefan Batory Foundation, 2006), 220-223

nationalism because the EU would gladly support Belarusian nationalism and anything else that would counter Russia.⁶⁷

Elites view that Belarus has a lot to offer Europe. The EU would benefit the most by working with the “well-educated, hard-working, and gifted people” of Belarus.⁶⁸ Elites are in agreement that the people of Belarus and their culture are the most valuable asset that Belarus has to offer. They assert that the Belarusian people are obedient almost to a fault, an asset that would greatly benefit the rest of Europe. Additionally, most of the elites share the consensus that Belarus would act as another component to the variety of cultures in Europe already and would contribute culture and art as well. Belarusians see themselves as having a lot to offer the outside world and view economic and other pragmatic assets that they could offer to Europe as secondary.

Three attitudes exist towards Europe among Belarusian elites: neutral, idyllic, and opposing. Most elites view Europe in a neutral way claiming that Europe provides a lot of cultural and historical significance and could be a potential economic partner. In contrast, some elites view Europe as an idyllic utopia that Belarus longs to return to and crucial for Belarusians to be a part of if they want their national identity to flourish. The elites who hold this view point are the nationalist elites whose goal is for Belarus to become completely de-Russified and de-Sovietized and join the democratic Europe. The third opinion is that of those who oppose the EU and do not appreciate the impositions upon Belarus from the European Union. These elites view Europe in a similar way as those who view Europe in a neutral way and have the additional characteristic of not

⁶⁷ Andrey Kazakevich, “Four corporations of Belarusian elite” in *Belarus: Neither Europe, nor Russia*, ed. Valer Bulhakau and Agnieszka Komorowska (Warsaw: Stefan Batory Foundation, 2006), 220-227

⁶⁸ Andrey Sannikau, in *Belarus: Neither Europe, nor Russia*, ed. Valer Bulhakau and Agnieszka Komorowska (Warsaw: Stefan Batory Foundation, 2006), 76

appreciating the attempt of the EU to meddle in Belarusian affairs and claim that the EU does not understand Belarus at all and they do not want to understand Belarus either.

The national character of the Belarusian people and the Lukashenka regime shape Belarusian politics. One of the biggest driving forces behind Belarusian politics is Soviet nostalgia. Another crucial force that elites, scholars, and politicians often discuss is the Belarusian mentality. A significant component of the mentality of the Belarusian people is their reluctance for change and desire for security. They desire security from the state and Lukashenka adopted a father-figure role to the Belarusian people. All of these factors together contribute to how Belarus deals with the international community. At present, it appears that Belarus is changing its traditional stances on its position in the international sphere and hopes to become more open to the possibilities of working with Europe, China, Latin America, and even expresses openness to working with the United States. Despite the movement towards more open policies with other partners, Belarusians are still reluctant to change and a drastic change in the status quo of Belarus is unlikely.

In a sense the regime in place in Belarus happened by accident since most of the elites who support Lukashenka are merely opportunists wishing to further their own careers. Because of this, it is hard to see what is real in the regime or what is not and who truly believes whatever ideology they say they believe.

6. Discussion

There exists a dichotomy between nationalism and the interests of the Belarusian state. The difference lies between maintaining and justifying Belarus as an independent nation-state and the fear Lukashenka has of nationalism and its threat to his regime. Scholar Andrej Dynko claims that Lukashenka uses financial pull as a means to keep

support. He suppresses the Belarusian language against the desires of the Belarusian people as a way to dampen any national movement in Belarus. The motive of Belarusian nationalism is to be used as a way to protect against Russian meddling and safeguard the country from “the growing appetites of Russian capitalists”. Despite many scholars insistence that language is crucial to the existence and survival of a nation as eloquently stated by Dynko, “The language’s cultural value is greater than its role as a means of communication”, Belarus continues to exist as a state.⁶⁹ The foreign policy since the 1990s in Belarus has reflected how the Belarusian people see themselves and/or how Lukashenka views and understands the Belarusian people.

6.1. Foreign Policy in the 1990s

Already in 1997, Lukashenka discussed an inclination towards a multi-vectored foreign policy. “Belarus Tomorrow” is a compilation of Lukashenka’s policies and goals for Belarus in 1997 and his own personally written book about Belarus’ present and future. The book acts as a prediction for many policies in Belarus today and demonstrates massive consistency in Lukashenka’s policies. His foreign policy in particular and goals for the foreign policy have remained essentially the same over the past nearly 20 years. The international sphere has changed; however, the policies in Belarus do not reflect this change. The foreign policy within Belarus has barely changed since the 1990s in that the policy under Lukashenka has always been a multi-vector one and the government has sought an open relationship with multiple partners, not just with one or two major partners. Lukashenka stated this when he was deeply entrenched in a relationship with Russia. The policy of Belarus has never been one that relies on one partner and officially

⁶⁹ Andrej Dynko, “Language of Street and Language of the Ploshcha,” in *Hopes, Illusions, Perspectives: Belarusian Society ‘2007*, ed. Marta Pejda (Warsaw-Minsk: National Endowment for Democracy, 2007), 56

never only relied on Russia, no matter how close their relationship and how much Belarus may rely on Russia. Lukashenka explicitly states that his main objective in foreign policy is to not be dependent on any outside player. The official policy since 1997 has not changed. Lukashenka officially does not want to be dependent on Russia or Europe or anyone else. The reality of the situation in Lukashenka may differ from the official policy but officially nothing has changed regarding foreign policy in Belarus. Lukashenka does not want to isolate Belarus from the international sphere and stated that this would not work for Belarus if the goal is to become an active participant in an ever globalizing world. He stated that a multi-vector approach to foreign policy was necessary in order for the domestic and international spheres and relations in Belarus to flourish. He unambiguously stated that he does not choose a multi-vector foreign policy for Belarus out of popularity or because it is the more accepted thing to do today (or in 1997) but because this is a necessity for Belarus in Belarus wants to be a part of the global community while simultaneously supporting internal interests at home. He uses the policy of “think global, act local” in his foreign policy approach. A key difference between 1997 and today is that Lukashenka explicitly states that in order for Belarus to “think global” a path towards Europe is necessary. The only way to become a global player in the international sphere would be for Belarus to work closely with Europe, says Lukashenka in 1997. This is drastically different than the EU-skepticism present in Belarus today and at various times over the past 20 years. He stated that the “direction of Belarusian foreign policy is invariable” towards all European structures, including NATO and the European Union. Lukashenka stressed the importance of a relationship with China earlier in 1997 while discussing further potential partners. He saw then almost 20 years ago that China could be a important partner for Belarus; however, there is no mention of Latin America despite the now strong relationship with many Latin American countries, particularly

Argentina and Brazil. In 1997, official Belarusian foreign policy gave priority to the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and stressed that any other special treatment would not be given to outside players. Nothing ought to be done to “jeopardize the integrity” of CIS. CIS today is still important for Belarus. Its importance lies in trade where the vast majority of exports from Belarus go the CIS countries, with Russia being the most important trading partner. Lukashenka stressed that Belarus ought to look out for its interests at home first and then later abroad. He stresses this importance because if Belarus is not stable itself, it would be impossible to contribute anything to the global community.⁷⁰

Foreign policy in Belarus today and also in 1997 has key features. It stresses all that the Belarusian people and the Belarus nation has to offer the international community and in particular Europe. Belarus wants the nation and its regime to have stability. Stability is the first priority of domestic policy in Belarus. This reflects the lack of desire for change in Belarus and that most Belarusians want to keep the status quo. Another feature of Belarusian foreign policy is unease and concern over being dependent on another country or polity. This is the main reason why Belarus officially seeks a multi-vectored foreign policy. A multi-vector foreign policy decreases dependence because Belarus would have more options than merely one or two vectors and less reliance on either of these vectors. The less reliance on one or two outsiders, the more secure and stable the Belarusian domestic sphere could be, according to Lukashenka and his regime. The domestic policy and foreign policy of Belarus interact with and complement each other. Each sphere reinforces the other sphere, with the domestic sphere being more

⁷⁰ Alexander Lukashenko, *Belarus Tomorrow*, (Geneva: EEDA, 1998) 40-44

important. Foreign policy in Belarus is only a certain way in order to strengthen the domestic sphere.⁷¹

Alexander Lukashenka wrote “Belarus Tomorrow” the same year that both the Charter and the Treaty of the Union of Belarus and Russia was signed by Russian President Boris Yeltsin and Belarusian President Lukashenka. Lukashenka officially maintained a multi-vectored approach to foreign policy during the time when the Belarus-Russia relationship was at its peak. Lukashenka and Yeltsin mutually worked together to strengthen ties between Belarus and Russia. This blatantly went against Lukashenka’s official foreign policy at the time in that he stated that he did not want to make any permanent ties with any foreign country or organization in order to keep Belarus’ foreign policy non-committable and to ensure that Belarus could work with multiple foreign actors instead of relying on one or two other actors.

Officially Lukashenka is open to working with any country or political body in the world that wishes to work with Belarus. He stresses the importance of mutually beneficial relationships with all potential and existing partners. In practice, Lukashenka does not seek out mutually beneficially partnerships but instead seeks partnerships that will benefit Belarus and does not emphasize the importance of Belarus to the partners. Officially, Belarus is open to any partnership that would make Belarus an active participant in the global arena. In practice, Belarus has ideological differences than certain partners that would make certain partnerships unlikely. In many areas, Belarus is unwilling to compromise, especially when working with the European Union. In other areas, some economic partnerships that are not as beneficially to Belarus as others might be take precedent because of ideological similarities. For example, a more pragmatic

⁷¹ Alexander Lukashenko, *Belarus Tomorrow*, (Geneva: EEDA, 1998): 40-44

choice for Belarus would be to work with Europe and increase economic ties with the EU since Europe is right next to Belarus and a close neighbor. Instead, Lukashenka has increasing ties with Latin America because Belarus and Latin America have ideological similarities that make their partnership harmonious. The socialist governments and “anti-Americanism” in Latin America make Latin America a feasible partner. Based on these ideological similarities, Belarus then implemented economic connections. The ideological differences between Belarus and the EU make mutually beneficial cooperation economically difficult. This is present today between Belarus and Russia as well since Russia changed its approach to foreign policy.⁷²

The modern Belarusian state cannot be understood without Lukashenka. Lukashenka became president in 1994; only 3 years after Belarus became an independent state. The Belarusian state and Lukashenka can be understood as indistinguishable. The policies implemented by the Belarusian government correspond to the goals of Lukashenka for his regime and for how he understands the Belarusian population. Lukashenka has created a regime and Belarusian identity based off of what he believes the Belarusian people want and what many Belarusians themselves do want. Lukashenka feels his regime reflects the Belarusian mentality and many Belarusians feel the same way. Every policy implemented by Lukashenka reflects the identity and ideology of the Belarusian people, an identity and ideology manifested by Lukashenka.

Being resistant to change is a characteristic of the Belarusian people. The government is reluctant to make any new connections with partners or anything concrete because many elites state that this is typical for Belarusians to not want to make any permanent decisions that they cannot back out of later, in case it is the wrong decision.

⁷² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus. “Our Relations with United States and Latin American countries.” Mfa.gov.by. (Accessed May 19, 2016)

These elites claim that Belarusian people are cautious and resistant to change; two traits that make sticking with the status quo seem like the best possible option for Belarusians. It is possible that many Belarusians do want change and would prefer different foreign and domestic policies but it is easier and more comfortable to keep things the way they are, especially when the current situation is satisfactory. Outsiders looking into Belarus think it is impossible for people to enjoy living in the way they are. This may be true for Belarusians, that they would prefer a different regime or a different leader; however, things in Belarus are not bad enough to warrant a drastic change in the regime in Belarus and for the past 20 years, nothing has changed in the country. This is not only typical for Belarusians but typical for humans as a whole that if given the opportunity between sticking with something that is sufficiently good and pursuing change with unknown consequences, people often prefer to remain with the less risky situation. Many Belarusians might want a different regime, but the risk of things becoming worse than the current situation deters most Belarusians from an active pursuit of change.⁷³

6.2. Belarus Today

Global watchdog organizations like FreedomHouse continue to criticize Lukashenka's regime in Belarus. FreedomHouse deems Belarus as not free and views all of Lukashenka's actions as solely motivated by Lukashenka's own personal goals and whims. The rating for Belarus is 6.5 out of 7, with 7 being the worst rating and meaning absolutely not free.⁷⁴ The consensus of western countries and organizations is that Belarus is not a democratic country and its elections continue to fail to meet democratic standards.

⁷³ Volha Abramava, "Does Belarusian Identity exist?" in *Belarus: Neither Europe, nor Russia*, ed. Valer Bulhakau and Agnieszka Komorowska (Warsaw: Stefan Batory Foundation, 2006), 111-112

⁷⁴ Freedom House. "Belarus." Freedomhouse.org.
<https://freedomhouse.org/country/belarus> (Accessed May 17, 2016)

Belarus, however, does not claim to be a democracy, so the accusation of not being democratic is not offensive to Lukashenka or his regime. Lukashenka, and likely all the Belarusian people, appreciate the regime in place the way it is. There are a few political dissidents who do not agree with the current regime, but they are few. The general assumption of the west is that most Belarusians are unhappy with the regime in place and wish to have a fully realized democracy but are unable to demand this out of fear of their government. It is impossible to know the reality of the situation and whether or not the people are content with the status quo or are all just pretending to be for the sake of not being arrested. Lukashenka continues to ask the west why they care so much about what is going on in Belarus when he strongly believes that it is none of their business. The EU and the United States claim that the interests of the Belarusian people as their main concern, suggesting that the Belarusian people are held hostage by Lukashenka's regime and ideology.

This paper functions under the assumption that the majority of the Belarusian people appreciates Lukashenka and his regime and do not want to have a democracy that adheres to western standards. This research assumes that the government and ideology of Lukashenka reflect the ideology of the Belarusian people. Belarus did not follow the typical mode of nation building as other nations and currently lacks some of the critical components to national identity such as religious identity and wide-spread use of the national language. Nevertheless, Belarusian national identity contains certain characteristics that define the country and two of these characteristics are post-Soviet nostalgia and anti-elitism. These two characteristics contribute to how the Belarusian people see themselves as a nation and in turn, how Lukashenka uses these characteristics as a basis for his policies. Recently, Lukashenka stated that he has been pursuing a multi-vectored approach to foreign policy for the past few years and this paper outlines how

this multi-vectored approach aligns with the Belarusian sense of national identity and how in the short term it seems counter to the ideologies of the Belarusian people but ultimately is in line with how Belarus sees itself as a nation.⁷⁵

There does not exist a Belarusian civil society and there is not a demand for one either. Belarusians adhere more to Soviet expectations of the government, consequently resulting in “the deterioration of individual responsibility, reluctance to independently make decisions, and no need for free choice”. One opinion is that the goal of the Belarusian government is to keep the Belarusian people uneducated and unable to think for themselves. This leaves no desire for non-governmental organizations, which are isolated from the state.⁷⁶

6.3. Lukashenka Most Recent Discussion on Foreign Policy

Recently in mid-April 2016, Lukashenka held a session to discuss relations between Belarus and the European Union. This session broadly outlined the goals of Belarus in its relation to the European Union. The session was enlightening and Lukashenka explained the situation of Belarus in its relations between the West and Russia. He stated that it was the destiny of Belarus to always be situated between the two great powers of Russia and the European Union. Lukashenka explicitly states that Russia is the brother of Belarus and that Belarusian economic and political relations with Russia must remain consistent with this. Lukashenka stated, “Russians are our brothers whether some like it or not. Our relations with them should be consistent with the fact”.

⁷⁵ Grigory Ioffe, *Understanding Belarus and How Western Foreign Policy Misses the Mark* (USA, 2008)

⁷⁶ Marta Pejda, “By Way of a Preface,” in *Hopes, Illusions, Perspectives: Belarusian Society ‘2007*, ed. Marta Pejda (Warsaw-Minsk: National Endowment for Democracy, 2007), 4-5

Lukashenka later discussed the potential benefits that Belarus will gain with the European Union and their recent openness to cooperate with Belarus. Belarus can help stop drug and human trafficking flow from the east to the west but also seeks to increase trade and other economic opportunity within Belarus. The current plan for Lukashenka is to solidify whatever potential benefits that Belarus can extract from the European Union and further negotiations. Lukashenka firmly believes that the potential benefits of working with the European Union are greater than the benefits of sticking to political bias. Lukashenka claims he will not work within the parameters of having to abide by ultimatums imposed by the West onto Belarus, has been pursuing a multi-vector approach to foreign policy already for years, and sees the vast economic potential in Russia, Central Asia, and now China.⁷⁷

When discussing cooperation with outside organizations, namely the EU or the WTO, Lukashenka emphasizes the pursuit of Belarusian national interests above all. Trade and export are key components to the Belarusian economy, making it impossible for the country to thrive without becoming an active member of the world economy; however, Lukashenka clearly states that the main prerogative of the country lies in establishing or increasing these relations is the national interests of the country.

Lukashenka held a session to discuss cooperation with the World Trade Organization. The general tone of the entire session was skepticism. Lukashenka outlined the fact that the WTO up until recently had no interest in Belarus becoming a member. Lukashenka stated the potential benefits of not being in the WTO, namely freedom from

⁷⁷ The Press Service of the President of the Republic of Belarus. "Session to discuss Belarusian-European relations." President.gov.by.
http://president.gov.by/en/news_en/view/session-to-discuss-belarusian-european-relations-13424 (Accessed May 17, 2016)

being bound to certain regulations and the prevention of the WTO to “impose certain obligations on [Belarus]”. Lukashenka also deemed it necessary to honor the other agreements between Belarus and its other trade partners, such as Russian and Belarus but ultimately decided Belarus will intensify its talks and negotiations with the WTO.⁷⁸

It remains to be seen whether or not Belarus becomes a member of the WTO. The common theme of Belarusian foreign policy has been non-committal. Belarus often makes plans or has negotiations without even deciding something concrete. This leaves Belarus with the freedom it desires to not be bound to any obligations or have to adhere to certain regulations. Belarus enjoys the isolation and does not seem eager to change its current state of affairs. Lukashenka’s emphasis on supporting the national interests in Belarus over anything else suggests that Lukashenka is not motivated to work with other people as much as he is motivated to secure the interests of the Belarusian people and protect them like the father he is to the people. The goal of Lukashenka is to protect nation interests and therefore do what is in the interests of the Belarusian people. His instinct is to pursue isolation and not commit to alliances with outsiders in any concrete way as certain obligations might later ensue that would go against the national interests of the Belarusian people. The issue that then arises is the fact that Belarus cannot maintain its independence without some degree of dependence on outsiders. Belarus relies heavily on export for economic security and its partnerships with its big trading partners contribute to the Belarusian economy. Lukashenka stated himself that Belarus would always be caught in between Russia to the east and the EU to the west. The geographical position of Belarus does not allow for the country to isolate itself and remain free from

⁷⁸ The Press Service of the President of the Republic of Belarus. “Session to discuss cooperation with World Trade Organization.” President.gov.by.
http://president.gov.by/en/news_en/view/session-to-discuss-cooperation-with-world-trade-organization-13374/ (Accessed May 17, 2016)

external pressure or influence. The EU wants to expand eastwards and have a buffer against Russia and disguise this desire by focusing heavily on the political situation in Belarus. As soon as the EU sensed some potential of Belarus to work with the EU and look westwards as Ukraine has done recently, the EU backed off on these political impositions and lifted sanctions on Belarus. Lukashenka played into what the EU wanted by releasing some political prisoners and appearing to cooperate more with the EU in hopes to gain some financial support from the EU. But the desire to work with the EU stops here at attracting investment and other means of flow of money from the EU to Belarus. Lukashenka still views Russia as its brother and partner and recently stated he will respect this bond. He also hopes to continue and expand ties with Central Asian countries and with China. Within Belarus' multi-vectored policy, the EU is a possible vector but only to a certain extent. Belarus sees the EU as a vector only to the extent of attracting investment in Belarus from EU member states and Belarus gaining another potential market for its exports. Belarus only wants a relationship with the EU if there will be clear benefits to the Belarusian people and does not want to be subject to the EU meddling in the affairs of Belarus, which poses a potential threat as the EU has strict criteria for how Belarus ought to behave politically, although when there is an opportunity for the EU to use Belarus as a way to undermine Russia, then these political impositions do not matter as much.

6.4. Analysis of Dependence in Foreign Policy

The difference between the potential and actual dependence of Belarus on the European Union and on Russia is that the dependence of Belarus of the European Union would most likely not be a threat to the sovereignty of Belarus. The European Union supports nation-states and encourages democracy, which states often achieve through nationalism. There is no fear for the Belarusian state's existence by means of dependence

on the European Union. Dependence on Russia, on the other hand, may potentially leave Belarus' sovereignty vulnerable, especially through the pursuit of the Union State (which neither state is currently actively pursuing). The dependency on Russia for Belarus acted as a way for Belarus to secure its independence. Less dependency on Russia leaves the independence of Belarus vulnerable, as Belarus needs to make sure that it can secure itself on its own without preferential support from Russia or without the economic and political benefits from maintaining a connection with Russia.

The sovereignty of Belarus is not under threat by aligning with the European Union; however, its independence is. If Belarus aligns with the EU, Belarus would have to follow very specific stipulations. Lukashenka would certainly have to give up his presidency and the economy would have to undergo serious reforms. The regime that Lukashenka manifested over the past two decades would have to drastically change and all but disappear. This is not something that Lukashenka or the Belarusian people want. Hence, the adoption recently of more vectors to the Belarusian foreign policy, in hopes to solve this predicament of being caught between Russia and Europe, a position Belarus has found itself in for centuries, although usually siding with Russia to the east and not working with the west. Lukashenka feels the presence of dependence and using his role as the father of the Belarusian people, he aspires to protect the Belarusian people and their independence. He attempts this by a method that would prevent the Belarusian people from having to sacrifice either their sovereignty or their desire to make their own decisions for themselves, decisions based on what the Belarusian people want from their government or how Lukashenka wants to govern the Belarusian people.

6.4.1. Application of Interdependence Theory to Belarus

Belarus pursues interdependency as a means to break out of its dependency on its huge neighbors to the west and to the east. Historically, politically, and economically,

Belarus has enormous ties to Russia, which places Belarus in a vulnerable position of dependency on Russia. Belarus also has large ties with the European Union and after Russia it is the second greatest region for export for Belarus. In line with dependency theory, Belarus values its independence and views it as protection from external dominion. Belarus currently seeks interdependent connections with non-traditional sources. Latin America and China are two of these sources and since the mid-2000s these ties have been increasing yearly.

Belarus does not view itself as a dependent nation and official seeks *mutual* relationships with all its foreign partners, which is particularly emphasized when describing its policy towards Russia, CIS, the European Union, and the United States. Belarus claims to be entirely open to respectful and mutually beneficially partnerships and that any issues with these aforementioned entities has stemmed from the others unwillingness to view Belarus as an equal and respect its own domestic policies.

The real situation in Belarus is in line with the “core/periphery” aspect of dependency theory, is that many countries, particularly those in the west, categorize Belarus as a “third-world country”, with a repressive regime. The view that Belarus is underdeveloped and has a regime that is not as advanced as the “first world countries” suggests that Belarus’ desire for a mutually beneficial interdependent relationship with these countries will prove to be impossible until they acknowledge that Belarus is not backwards or somehow lagging behind the West, or other countries that deem themselves as more developed and entitled to cast judgment on the Belarusian government.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Thomas Angotti, “The Political Implications of Dependency Theory,” *Latin American Perspectives* 8, no. 3 (1981): 125-135

What is the difference between dependence and interdependency and how are they related in the context of Belarus? Belarus' official policy maintains that it wishes to secure its independence. At one point in time, Belarusian dependency on Russia secured its independence by granting Belarus the means necessary to maintain its sovereignty by way of economic support. Belarus feared that Russia's change in its foreign policy beginning in the early 2000s threatened Belarusian independence as Belarus no longer enjoyed as preferential treatment as it had in the past (though still very preferential). Belarus does not want to be solely dependent on any foreign country out of fear of vulnerability to the independence of the Belarusian nation. Belarus still maintains strong ties and relations with Russia but seeks other avenues within the international community that are mutually beneficial to each participant (interdependency). I maintain that Belarus is adopting an interdependent approach in order to break away from dependency. Belarus does not want to be dependent, not only on Russia, but also not on any other country or polity. Working with Latin American countries allows Belarus the mutual relationship it seeks since Latin America and Belarus have similar economic and political policies. Belarus fears dependence. Lukashenka does not want Belarus to depend on outside partners. The solution to this problem is interdependence and a multi-vectored foreign policy. Belarus depends on Russia for energy sources. Belarus does not depend on the European Union for energy or for trade. The Belarusian economy is tied to CIS and to Russia within CIS. Belarus does not mind this dependence as long as it does not pose a threat to Belarusian security. Dependence in itself has the potential to create some type of threat to the dependent and gives the donor country more power. Most countries today are not exclusively dependent. For example, Belarus may be dependent on Russia for energy resources like gas and oil; however, Russia depends on Belarus as a political partner and a buffer country between Russia and the EU. Each country in this circumstance depends

on the other to some extent. The degree of dependence varies between each participant. Interdependence exists to some magnitude in the majority of relations in the international community, especially in an ever inter-connected and globalized world.

In the case of Belarus, there seemed to be only one vector in their foreign policy from the 1990s to the early 2000s- Russia. Belarus switched its policies after it began to fear that having a uni-vector approach to its foreign policy would prove to be a threat to Belarusian independence and sovereignty. This fear stems from the change in Russian foreign policy to a more pragmatic approach and Belarus then feeling the need to reevaluate its approach to foreign policy. Another possible reason for this multi-vector approach in Belarus is not that it wishes to break ties with Russia, but that Lukashenka sees opportunities with the EU and China to attract investment and money into the Belarusian economy, while maintaining its special relationship with Russia. Belarus is so intrinsically connected with Russia that it would take drastic measures and new relationships in order to break out of this relationship. That is why Belarus is working not only with China and the EU, but also with the non-world power of Latin America. Latin American countries and Belarus are connected in the fact that they both experience dependence and external pressure from giant powers. By working with each other they gain the potential of another source of bargaining power.

7. Conclusion

At first glance, Belarusian foreign policy seems to be changing and opening up to becoming less dependent on Russia and more open to new partnerships. Officially, this foreign policy has not changed and Lukashenka has always adopted a multi-vectored approach to Belarusian foreign policy. In 1997, President Lukashenka was already

discussing his plans for a more incorporated Belarus into the international arena in his book *Belarus Tomorrow*.

I highlight the complicated intricacies behind Lukashenka and his policies, namely his foreign policy. Initially, it appears that Lukashenka changes his standpoints depending on the international climate and decides spontaneously how the Belarusian government will deal with the international community in its foreign relations. I used qualitative analysis of the opinions of Belarusian elites, Lukashenka himself, the official policies of the Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as secondary material written by Belarusian scholars and specialists.

The findings of my qualitative research reflect that Belarusian foreign policy is in fact consistent. Belarusian foreign policy at first glance appears that it has changed from uni-vectored to multi-vectored, from a close relationship with Russia to a relationship more and more open to the west and other international partners. In fact, the situation is not so simple and does not follow a linear path of becoming less dependent on Russia and more interdependent with other partners. Instead, Belarus consistently has been multi-vectored officially under Lukashenka's regime since the 1990s. Belarus' movement between different vectors is typical for Belarus. Despite the multi-vectored official foreign policy in Belarus, President Lukashenka maintains that Russia is still the main partner with Belarus, no matter what new connections are being forged between Belarus and other international actors. Lukashenka maintains a multi-vectored approach to foreign policy and shows no signs of altering this policy. The official policy and the reality of the foreign policy in Belarus does not exactly line up as in lieu of the claim that Belarus seeks open and mutual beneficial relationships with all its partners, Lukashenka still resists making any concrete partnerships and relies mostly on Russia. A multi-vectored approach

to foreign policy is in line with Lukashenka's desire to decrease dependence on Russia and corresponds to Lukashenka's idea of what the Belarusian people want based on his understanding of the Belarusian identity. The identity question in Belarus is strongly related to the role of dependence and interdependence in foreign policy. Not only do Belarusians seek to understand themselves but also have a way in which they want the world to see and understand them. The multi-vectored approach to Belarusian foreign policy is not in its essence about reality, but mostly about imagine and how Belarus wants to project itself to others and how it wants to be seen by others. The main goal is mutual benefits and respect, and this is clearly something that Belarus feels it is lacking. In investigating the inner workings of Lukashenka's policies it aids in unveiling the mystery of Belarus.

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